

IRELAND

Privatizing Public Services/Ireland

When the government decided to contract out all support services in Northern Ireland hospitals, the jobs of 11,000 workers, most of them women, were at stake and so was the ability to provide health care. It seemed a foregone conclusion that jobs would be lost and the low-wage women workers felt unable to confront the international health conglomerate that intended to buy many of the hospital services.

But UNISON, the union of public-sector employees, led by Inez McCormack, fought a yearlong battle based on showing the unseen value of women's work in health care and building alliances with the community and with unions in the United States and Europe. The women trade unionists confronted the company at its annual general shareholder meeting. They saved the hospitals and developed a new generation of women leaders.

